

**I CLAIM:**

- 1 In an image processing method that includes steganographically decoding an input two-dimensional image to extract a multi-bit code therein, the image comprising a two-dimensional array of pixels, an improvement comprising:
- 5 transforming the image into the spatial frequency domain;  
pattern matching the transformed image so spatial frequencies obtained by said transforming step coincide with reference spatial frequencies, to thereby effect registration of the transformed image;  
inverse-transforming the transformed image to yield a registered image;  
identifying, in the registered image, a plurality of regions that encode a first control bit, said
- 10 regions being distributed through the registered image in a regular array;  
performing a statistical analysis over at least said plurality of regions to determine whether the first control bit has first or second values;  
if said control bit has the first value, performing a first decoding process on the image to extract the code therefrom; and
- 15 if said control bit has the second value, performing a second decoding process on the image to extract the code therefrom, the second decoding process being different than the first.

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